
From: Justin Smith [mailto:freedivesmith@gmail.com]
Sent: Friday, September 28, 2007 11:26 AM
To: MLPAComments
Subject: MPA at Sea Ranch not Gerstle cove to Black point!

I recently heard that there is a debate over areas considered for closure in the MLPA. It is my understanding that some people are advocating a MPA from Gerstle Cove to Black Point. In my opinion the area from Gerstle Cove to Black Point offers the best diving on the Sonoma coast.

As an avid spearfishermen and abalone diver I dive this stretch of coast line almost every weekend. Since much of the area between Gerstle Cove and Black Point is owned by the state parks there is a huge section of coast line open to the public for shore diving. Furthermore Fisk mill is one of the most sheltered coves from a north west swell on the Sonoma coast and would fall in this stretch of coast line. On some days Fisk mill cove is the only place safe enough to dive between Fort Ross and Gualala.

Closing this area would create a safety problem as many divers would be tempted to dive more exposed areas which can be quite dangerous. Sea ranch on the other hand has poor public access and is mostly exposed to a typical north west swell. The abalone diving is good at sea ranch, but it is also good from Gerstle Cove to Black Point.

A marine protected area in sea ranch would not affect me as I rarely dive Sea Ranch since it has so few public access points. However a MPA from Gerstle Cove to Black Point would negatively affect me as well as thousands of other spearfishermen and abalone divers. I find it appalling that a MPA is even being considered in the Gerstle Cove to Black Point area.

I wonder if the people who are suggesting this are qualified enough to represent the public. They are certainly not representing consumptive divers who greatly outnumber non-consumptive divers on the Sonoma coast. The motivation for a MPA in Gerstle Cove to Black Point is driven by something other then protecting our natural resources while still providing public access to the resource.

Justin Smith,
Sebastopol Ca